

SUICIDE

Context

Teenage depression and suicide are areas of continuing concern for health professionals. Suicide was the second most common cause of death among 15 to 24 year-olds in Wisconsin in 1997, accounting for 100 deaths (19%). Forty-four of these deaths occurred among 15 to 19 year-olds (Bureau of Health Information, 1999b). Nationally, suicide is the third leading cause of death for persons aged 15 to 24 (National Center for Health Statistics, 1999).

The YRBS asked questions about whether students had seriously considered or attempted suicide in the past 12 months, and, if they had attempted suicide, whether those attempts resulted in injuries that required treatment by a doctor or nurse.

Highlights

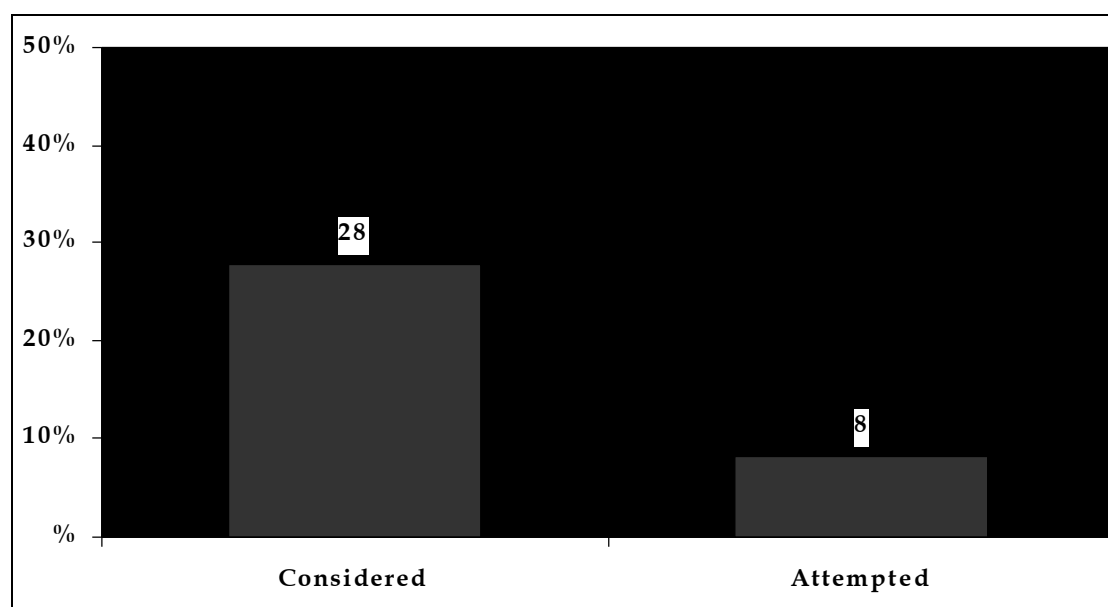
- More than a quarter of high school students reported being depressed in the past year.
- More than a quarter of high school students seriously considered committing suicide in the past year.
- Female students are more likely than male students to have depression and to consider and attempt suicide.

General Prevalence Rates

More than a quarter of high school students reported being depressed in the past year¹. As many students reported seriously considering suicide in the past twelve months, while eight percent reported actually attempting suicide in the same period (see Figure 1). About one-quarter of students who attempted suicide (or two percent of all students) reported that their attempt resulted in an injury that required medical attention. These percentages are similar to the rates found in the Teen Assessment Project survey (as reported in Bogenschneider, et al., 1996). This survey found that a quarter of Wisconsin seventh through twelfth graders reported having thought about killing themselves in the past month and that nearly as many had made plans to commit suicide. One in eight reported actually attempting suicide. Interestingly, most parents do not worry at all about their child considering suicide (Ibid.).

Figure 1. Suicide

Percentage of all students who had seriously considered committing suicide or attempted suicide in the past 12 months.



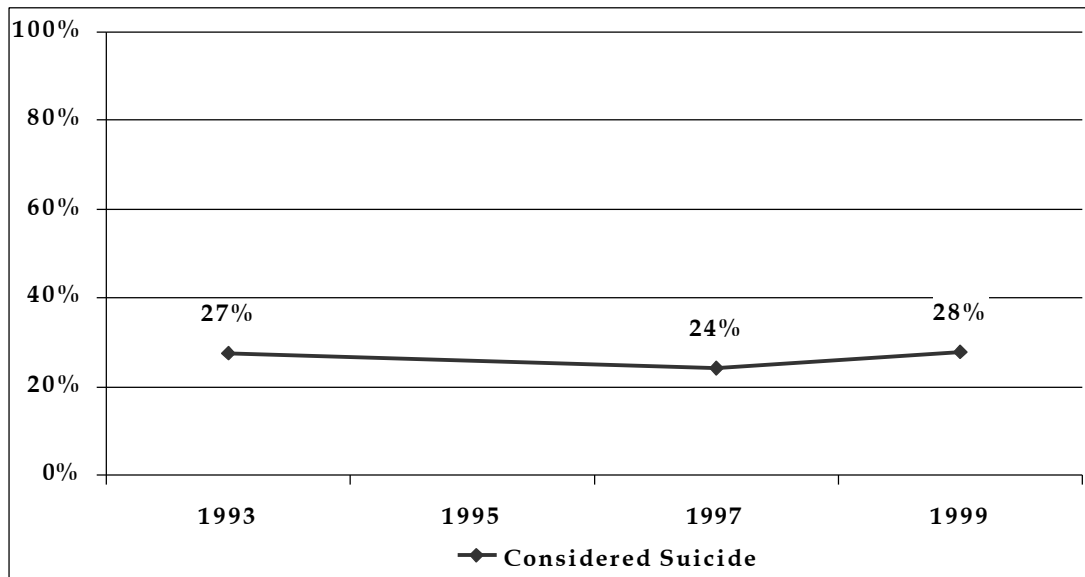
¹ Students were asked “During the past 12 months, did you ever feel so sad or hopeless almost every day for **two weeks or more in a row** that you stopped doing some usual activities?”

Trends

The percentage of students who reported seriously considering suicide dipped slightly in 1997 but increased in 1999 (see Figure 2). This difference is marginally significant. Because of changes in question wording between 1993 and 1999, no comparison of actual attempts is possible.

Figure 2. Changes in Suicide Behaviors: 1993-1999

Percentage of all students who had seriously considered committing suicide in the past 12 months by year of study.



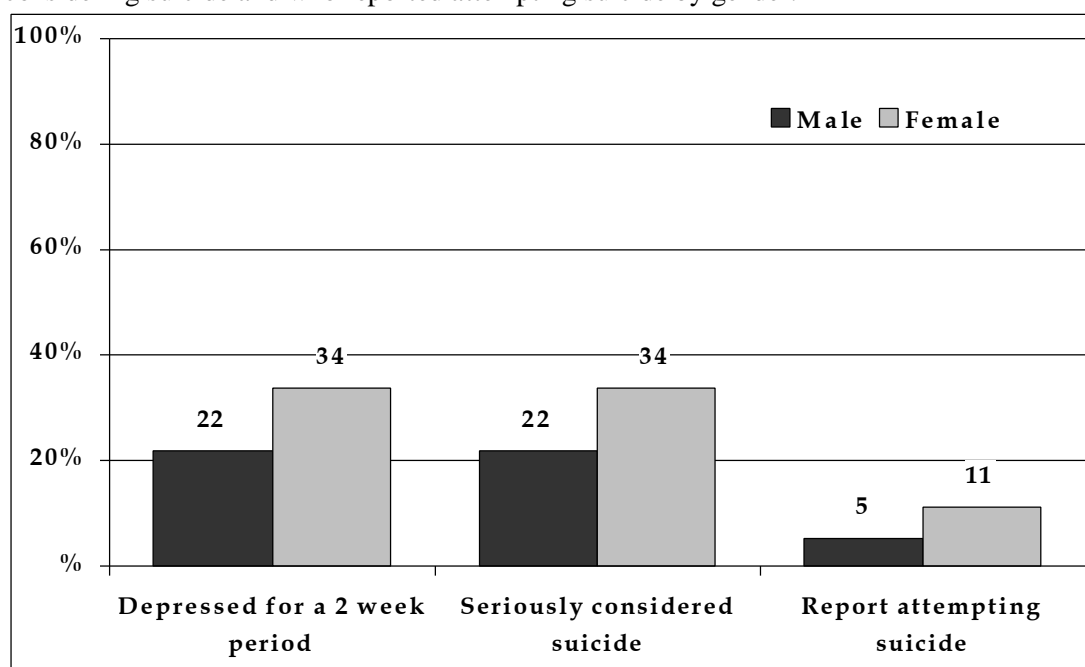
Comparisons by Demographic Groups

Gender

Female students reported higher risk behaviors than male students on every suicide measure (see Figure 3). Thirty-four percent of female students reported being depressed for a two week period compared to 22 percent of male students. 34 percent of female students and 22 percent of male students also reported seriously considering suicide. Female students were twice as likely as male students to report attempting suicide (11 percent compared to five percent). Of those who attempted to commit suicide, there was no significant difference between females and males reporting that suicide attempts resulted in an injury that required medical treatment.

Figure 3. Suicidal Behaviors by Gender.

Percentage of students who reported being depressed for a two week period, who reported seriously considering suicide and who reported attempting suicide by gender.



Grade

There were no significant differences between the grades on any measure of suicide. It does appear, however, that while not statistically significant, suicide attempts slightly decrease as grade increases. For example, ten percent of ninth grade students report at least one attempt compared to seven percent of twelfth grade students who do the same.